



### **Arizona RTI and the English Language Learner**

Arizona laws require that students, whose primary home language is not English, take an assessment called the Arizona English Language Learners Assessment (AZELLA). The AZELLA is comprised of six subtests: listening, speaking, reading, comprehension, writing and writing conventions. This assessment identifies students' English proficiency into five categories: pre-emergent, emergent, basic, intermediate and proficient. If students are not proficient on this assessment they must be placed in an ELL program and receive English language development (ELD). This can be by Structured English Immersion (SEI) classroom, four hours per day or Individual Language Learner Plan (ILLP). Schools that have less than 20 ELL students, within a three grade span, may use the ILLP in place of the SEI classroom. ILLP students are provided ELD instruction in the mainstream classroom. In both the SEI and ILLP, the students study the elements of the English language: reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar and vocabulary. The goal is that each student will become English proficient within a year. Once proficiency has been attained, students are exited from the ELL program, receive instruction in the mainstream classroom, and their progress is monitored for 2 academic years.

Students who receive a score of proficient on the AZELLA are reclassified as Fluent English Proficient (FEP) students. Some of these students, who are proficient in English, may still not have the literacy skills to be successful, without support, in the regular classroom. The Arizona Response To Intervention framework is part of a successful framework to address all at risk students including both English Language Learners who are in the SEI classrooms, on an ILLP, or students who are proficient on the AZELLA and are Fluent English Proficient in the mainstream classrooms. Essential components of AZ/RTI are:

- Using screening and formative assessment data to identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of instruction (i.e. Progress monitoring)
- Implementing multi-leveled evidence-based instruction that is matched to students' needs.

- Data-based decision making for instruction, movement within the multi-level system and disability identification (in accordance to state laws)

The U.S. Office of Special Education and the National Center on Response to Intervention both support the use of early intervention strategies to improve outcomes for English Language Learners. They focus efforts upon three areas:

- Understanding that education is a social entitlement achieved only when we provide equitable educational opportunities with high expectations for all students.
- Understanding the linguistic, cultural and experiential context of every student and how to incorporate this knowledge systematically into curriculum and instruction.
- Plan and adapt appropriate assessment instruction based on student's unique backgrounds.

(Brown and Sanford 2011)

Students are grouped for ELD instruction according to each student's English proficiency, but great variations in student's previous learning and talents may still put some at risk for limited success. Some students may have literacy skills in their first language (L1). Other students, in their homes, may have had exposure and have skills in English. Research shows that the more (English) words a student hears by the age of three has a direct relationship to their future English literacy skills. (Hart and Risley 1995).

According to a National Response to Intervention paper (RTI for English Language Learners); first generation immigrants generally have a more highly developed native language skill base. These students are able to use these skills in learning a new language. (Cummins 1981), Many ELL and FEP students may have been taught to read and write in their native language. Hart and Risley (1995) found that (for native English speakers) the amount of words the student hears by age three strongly predicts later academic achievement, so students who have heard no English in their early years may be at an even greater disadvantage. Some students may have been exposed to both native language and English, but not have a firm literacy background in either. Therefore, implementation of RTI requires a clear understanding of this research in order to make appropriate decisions about goal setting, curriculum, progress monitoring, intervention and flexible movement across levels.

Gunn et al., 2005 and Riedel, 2007 found that ELLs may also benefit from the RTI focus on preventing and responding to reading difficulties through the use of research-based practices, similar to the the benefits of RTI that have been demonstrated for students in general. The essential components of RTI include the following:

Within the SEI classroom (Tier I instruction), students may be screened to identify ones who are at risk. Screening may be done using AZELLA scores, tests of Oral Reading Fluency, with retell, mazes or other brief assessments to identify benchmark skill levels. Students who are found to be at risk may need additional time in an intervention class. Students who are in need of additional instruction may also need a diagnostic assessment such as a Quick Phonics Screener, to identify specific skill gaps to work on in the intervention class. Students who are in intervention classes should have specific goals written, over time, and be progress monitored at least bi-weekly using an assessment that will show incremental progress toward the established goals.

As students become proficient on the AZELLA and transition out of the SEI classroom or off of an ILLP, they may or may not be fully prepared for the mainstream classroom that will now become their Tier I, universal instruction.

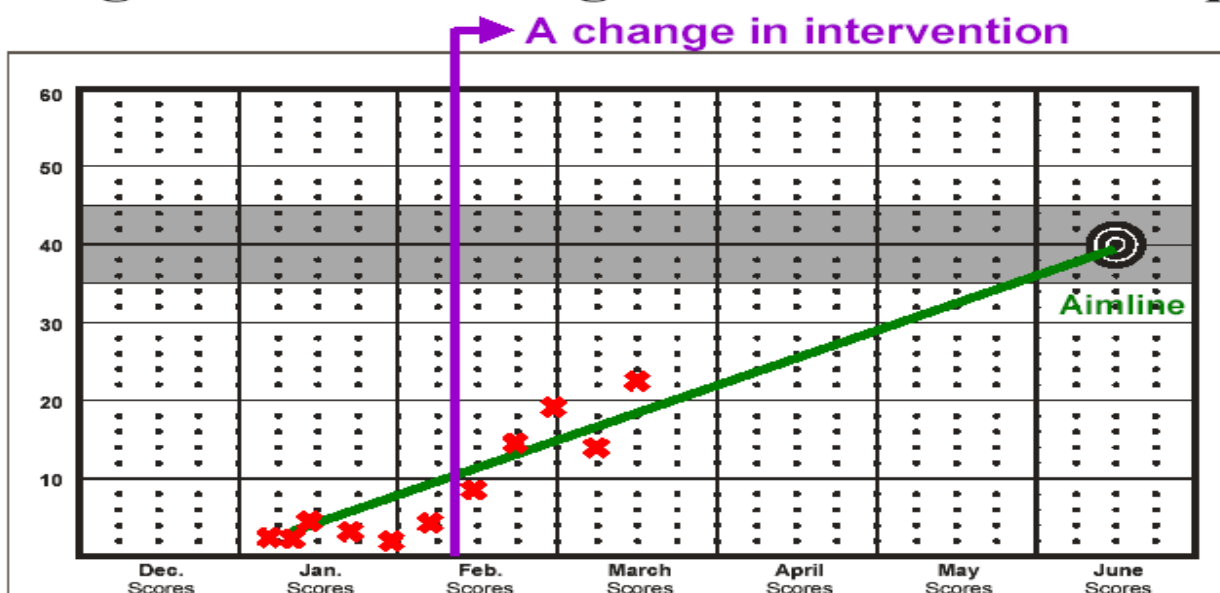
Screening assessments may be done for all new FEP students to make informed decisions about the student's risk factors in being successful in the regular classroom. Measures of phonological processing, alphabetic knowledge, and reading of word lists or connected text, are reliable means of determining which ELLs are likely to benefit from additional instructional assistance in reading. (Gersten, et al 2008) Grade level oral reading fluencies, with retell, are accurate measures of overall reading skill and can provide good baseline data for instruction.

Once it has been determined that a student needs additional support, the student may be assigned to a Tier 2 intervention. Generally Tier 2 intervention is an additional 30 minutes of literacy instruction. It is critical that goals are written for students before they begin their intervention classes. Based upon baseline data obtained from assessments, goals are written as growth over time. A graph can be made from the baseline to the goal over the target time. A line drawn from the base to the goal is called the aimline. Another critical component is that each student is progress monitored bi-weekly toward the goal. (See chart below) Some types of progress monitoring tools are: beginning and advanced Reading fluencies (DIBELS, Aims web, I Steep, Scantron), mazes, STAR reading, and other assessments of the students skill growth.

If three consecutive progress monitoring scores are below the aimline, the intervention is not successful and they need to problem solve for reasons. First the team would look

at fidelity of implementation. If fidelity is found then the intervention is at fault and should be changed. Changes to interventions may include: Curriculum, amount of time, time of day, group size or interventionist. Some students may have erratic assessments, with some being on the aimline and others being below the aimline. Generally, if the scores average below the aimline the intervention is changed. Again, the first thing to check is fidelity of the intervention plan. Basically, is there some reason for the student's lack of response to the intervention, other than the intervention itself is ineffective? Fidelity issues could be: amount of actual time vs. planned time, consistent use of curriculum, consistent attendance, or any other reason for the lack of growth due to implementation problems.

## Progress Monitoring: The Teacher's Map



In addition to academic support the student may need behavioral support. Students from varied cultural backgrounds may or may not have been taught the norms and routines that are in place in the school. It is important to teach the expectations directly and explicitly, just as we would the academic curriculum. Clearly teach, practice and reinforce expectations in every part of the school. (Halls, classroom, bathroom, cafeteria, etc.) Just as some students need more academic support in Tier 2, some students will need more support for behavior. The school should have in place behavioral interventions that are on a continuum from minor support to intensive. Some possible interventions are:

- Behavior Assessment
- Reteach with practice
- Student contract

- Tracking sheet
- Extra reinforcements
- Small group support
- One on one counseling
- Restrictive contract
- Partial day placements
- Alternative setting
- Parents/student involved

Behavioral interventions should be written with data based goals, just as the academic interventions were. An example would be a student who is disruptive in class. Data would be collected on the number of disruptions; a goal would be set and a time to accomplish the goal. A graph can be made of the number of disruptions per day over time and the results compared with the aimline acquired from graphing the line from baseline data with the goal. A successful intervention would see the number of disruptions declining toward the goal. It is important to provide positive reinforcement for the student exhibiting the new desired behaviors.

Students who are making progress toward closing the achievement and behavior gap may stay in Tier 2 interventions for long periods of time, but a few of them will need an additional Tier 3 intervention, which could be more time, smaller grouping and be focused on specific skill gaps identified with diagnostic assessments. So it is possible that a student could receive regular classroom literacy instruction, Tier 2 targeted reading, and Tier 3 Intensive reading intervention.